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Man pleads guilty to reign of arson terror

By Harry Harris
The Tribune

A pizza parlor worker police say is the "Alcatraz Arsonist" who deliberately set dozens of fires in Oakland and Berkeley in the last five years pleaded guilty yesterday to 24 counts of arson.

David Wayne Palmer, who has been in custody since Sept. 27 when he was arrested running away from one of the Oakland fires, will be sentenced in Alameda County Superior Court Jan. 8.

As part of a plea-bargain arrangement Palmer, 25, is look-

ing at a maximum 12 years in state prison.

Palmer has admitted setting the fires he pleaded guilty to and his attorney, Assistant Public Defender James Chaffee, said Palmer did not see any point in taking the case to trial.

He said Palmer is hoping the prison he is sent to will have programs enabling him to get psychiatric assistance.

Palmer has never told authorities why he set the fires, which caused hundreds of thousands of dollars in damage and terrified neighborhoods in the cities

where they occurred.

But Senior Deputy District Attorney Stacy Walthall and police investigators believe Palmer is a "classic textbook firebug who set the fires for sexual gratification."

Palmer is suspected of more than 80 fires dating back to 1982. But because the statute of limitations has expired on many of those crimes and because of a lack of evidence he was only charged with arson for fires he admitted.

The cases he is charged with go back to January 1985 and in-

clude fires set at in cars, garages, homes, trees and even laundry on a wash line.

One of the fires was set in March 1985 in a shed alongside a house on Hillegas Street where Palmer used to live. The most serious was an apartment blaze in the 600 block of Alcatraz Avenue in Oakland on Jan. 30, 1985 that did more than \$100,000 damage.

Many of the fires set in North Oakland and South Berkeley were started by Palmer as he walked home from his job at a pizza parlor, according to police.